

Leadership in string quartets: paradox and possibility

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A survey of 106 conservatoire students and professional string players is reported in which information was gathered regarding practices and views on leadership in the string quartet. The questions were structured using Likert scales, focussing on respondents' background, experiences of string quartet playing, their experiences of leadership and their views on what works in their own ensembles. There were a number of open ended questions to capture additional comments. Measures of total playing time and identity suggest that string quartet playing is an important aspect of players' portfolio of activities. The concept of shared leadership is supported; overall, players strongly agreed with the statement, "in the quartet, leadership is equally shared between members". Self -assessment of leadership abilities were equal across all instruments. Views also suggest that the nature of leadership varies according to its purpose, which in this study were defined as musical, administrative or team leadership. Factors relating to leadership were considered important for long term success of the quartet. Differences emerged between violinists and non-violinists, particularly in relation to views on sharing musical leadership, and on leadership in rehearsal and performance. Non-violinists agreed more strongly than violinists with the statements, "musical leadership is important for the long term success of the quartet" ($t(61)=-1.96$, $p<0.05$) and "sharing musical leadership is important to success" ($t(61)=-2.51$, $p<0.05$). Differences also emerged in relation to leadership in rehearsal and performance, particularly the role of the first violin. The results are discussed in the light of previous research, and analysed in the context of a theoretical framework proposed by Smith and Lewis (2011) for categories of organisational tensions relating to paradox theory in organisations.

Keywords: String quartet, leadership, shared leadership, paradox

References

Smith, W. K., & Lewis, M. W. (2011). Toward a theory of paradox: A dynamic equilibrium model of organizing. *Academy of Management Review*, 36 (2), 381-403.